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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4996
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7074
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4444
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8339
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5568
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2794
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2978
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4852
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5428
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0035
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0539
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002525

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: DOMESTIC BACKLASH TO IRAN/VISA ISSUES BEGINS

REF: LA PAZ 02511

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Although not as massive, immediate, or united as Bolivian domestic defense of USAID after the Bolivian Government attacked it in August, public opinion is beginning to come out against the Bolivian Government's September 11 announcements on establishing diplomatic ties with Iran and implementing new requirements for U.S. tourist visas that go beyond reciprocity. Opposition civic leaders from Santa Cruz, national opposition political leaders, and the tourism industry are beginning to react to the surprise announcements, which appear to have been made over the objections of some senior members of the government, including the Vice President (ref a).

¶2. (C) By coincidence the announcements were made shortly before the Ambassador hosted a lunch for a group of Bolivian senators. During that lunch, Senate Foreign Relations Commission Chairman Tito Hoz de Vila (Podemos, Cochabamba) said he would use the opposition's hold on the Senate to act as a check against executive overreach. Two days later, on September 13, the Commission called for the Foreign Minister to provide an explanation of the decision to unilaterally establish diplomatic relations with Iran and to require new visa requirements for U.S. citizens. Although Hoz de Vila publicly endorsed the idea of moving toward visa reciprocity, he criticized the "barbaric" decision to place the U.S. in the same visa category as Angola, Somalia, and Yemen, adding it would only hurt the Bolivian tourist industry. He also cautioned that Iran is in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

¶3. (C) President Evo Morales made public comments September 12 to calm fears about Iranian relations, explaining members of his own government have expressed "fears" about establishing diplomatic ties with Tehran. He said even "pro-imperialistic" countries such as Colombia and Chile maintain diplomatic relations with Iran "with no problems." Cuban Ambassador Rafael Dausa also chimed in September 12, maintaining that Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia are an "axis of peace" that rejects the U.S. "imperial mandates," which is why the U.S. stigmatizes them for decisions such as seeking diplomatic relations with Iran. (Comment: This despite the fact that there has been no such U.S. stigma directed at

Bolivia for the decision. To the contrary, the Ambassador said that although we have well-known outstanding concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and links to terrorism, Bolivia is a sovereign country that can have diplomatic relations with whatever country it wants and we hope the decision won't adversely affect relations with the U.S. The "axis of peace" is obviously trying to advance a Davids vs. Goliath paradigm with no basis in reality. End Comment.)

COMMENT

¶4. (C) Comment: Evo appears to have underestimated the importance Bolivians, even some within his own administration, place on relations with the U.S. despite a month-plus of constant "anti-imperialist" jabbing. The GOB is already dancing on the visa issue, throwing out confusing statements about being able to process the visa at the airport or border, later explaining it would have to be processed or at least started through Bolivian consulates in the U.S. We continue to ask for clarification. End Comment.

GOLDBERG